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ABSTRACT

Napi stories have been passed down from generation to generation in the Blackfeet Nation. All Blackfeet people knew of Napi, from the serious side of his creation to the foolish and spiteful deeds he performed. At one time it is said that Napi could talk with all living things--the animals, plants, rocks, everything. He teased, pulled pranks, many times on himself. His actions began a cycle of existence. Each family has their own interpretation of the various Napi stories, but in the final analysis each story has a common moral in the ending. One story might teach a lesson or prove a point; another story may tell of how a certain part of nature came to be. Through the stories compiled in this volume, it is hoped that Blackfeet children and others will begin to obtain an understanding of the Blackfeet people. Titles included are "Dreams," "How to Pick Berries," "Indian Customs and Beliefs of Days Past," "Magic Leggings," "Napi and His Mate," "Napi and the Birds," "Napi and the Elk Dance," "Napi Looses His Eyes," "Napi Punishes the Rock," "Napi Teases the Bear," "Napi, the Ground Squirrels, and the Bobcat," and "The Story of Marriage." Full page black and white drawings by Blackfeet artists Barbara Gilham Aubert, Tracy Rutherford, and Kenny Doore illustrate each story. (Author/NEC)

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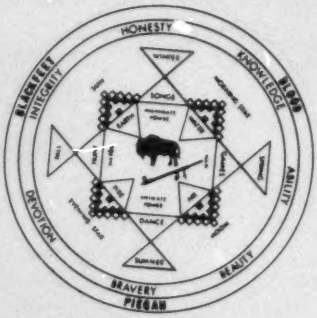
NAPI STORIES

Writer-Compiler

Darnell Davis Rides At The Door



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Dedicated to those that understand Napi,
who lives in us all.

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Designed and Edited by Roxanne De Marce

NAPI STORIES

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Introduction

At one time it is said that Napi could talk with all living things — the animals, plants, rocks, everything.

Napi referred to all the animals as his brothers and sisters.

All Blackfeet knew of Napi, from the serious side of his creations to the foolish and spiteful deeds he performed, this is where we get our Napi stories.

Napi stories have been passed down from generation to generation in the Blackfeet Nation up until today. Each family has their own interpretation of the various Napi stories, but in the final analysis each story has a common morale in the ending. One story might teach a lesson or prove a point; whereas, another story may tell of how a certain part of nature came to be.

It should be noted, however, that Napi stories are best told in sequence. He teased, pulled pranks, many times on himself, and so on. His actions began a cycle of existence.

This selection of stories are not the only Napi stories that exist today. The stories that are featured represent a limited amount of these stories.

Through these stories we hope that our children and others will begin to obtain an understanding of the Blackfeet people.

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Dreams

Long ago the Blackfeet people lived by Napi teachings. Napi showed the people many, many things. Napi also gave the Indians the will to live by creating animals, plants and all living creatures for their use. He gave the people a proper way to live, but he also showed them the wrong ways.

One gift that Napi gave the Blackfeet was the power of dreams. He taught the people how to use their dreams in a good way. Men would go to the mountains to find their dreams. They would sleep on buffalo skull pillows and dream. When they returned to camp, they would follow the advice they saw in their dreams.

The Indians respected their dreams and were not afraid. They knew dreams would help all the people.

Napi taught the people all things in those days. Today we tell the stories of Napi, as we heard them from our elders.

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How to Pick Berries

One day Napi had nothing to do. He decided to go for a walk toward the river. When he got to the river, he saw some nice, ripe bullberries.

Napi wanted some of these berries, so he decided to dive into the water. He dove several times with no success. He couldn't reach the bottom of the river, nor the berries.

Soon Napi decided to tie some rocks around his waist and feet. The rocks were heavy and helped him stay under the water. He stayed under so long, he just about drowned. He tore the weights off and came up with no berries.

Napi climbed out of the water and lay on the bank. As he was catching his breath, looking up toward the sky, he saw the bush of berries. They were not in the water after all. He realized he was diving at their reflection.

Napi was angry at the berries since he almost drowned. He went and got a big stick. He began hitting the bush hard, and the berries began to fall. Soon there was a great pile of bullberries on the ground.

And so Napi told the bullberry bush, "From now on this is the way people will get bullberries, because you will be full of thorns. They will hit you with a stick instead of picking you by hand."

Today this method of picking bullberries is still used.

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Kiyi'tahe
Barbara Aubert

Indian Customs and Beliefs of Days Past

In the olden days, the Indians didn't know the months. When the Winter started, everybody had to get settled down for the cold months. They looked and found the thickest part of the brush along the river, and that is where they made their camp. The only ones that moved in the Winter were those who went out to hunt for buffalo and deer. They knew that it was Winter when everything was buried and there weren't any leaves on the trees. The grass was dead and the birds had all gone south.

When everything started to thaw out and turn green, they knew that Spring was coming. The grass started to grow, the leaves started to come out, and the rivers got deep, and they called it Spring.

They knew when it was the middle of the Summer, because everything was full grown and ripe. The rhubarb and the turnips and the roots that they would dig for their Winter supply — everything was ripe. They would take the roots and dry them out and make soup out of them, just like you would with macaroni.

In the Fall of the year the trees would start to turn yellow and the leaves would fall off until the trees were bare. They would pick all of the ripe berries and dry them out for the Winter time. The Indians just had names for the four seasons, not for any of the months or weeks or years.

To tell the weather, they would look up at the moon at night. If there was a big circle around it, they would warn the people not to leave their teepees, because it was either going to be freezing or a blizzard. They usually had plenty of meat and wood so that they didn't have to go outside. In those days they didn't always dress too warmly. They had buffalo moccasins and buckskin leggings, and inside their teepees they had buffalo robes. At night when they would go to bed they would take cottonwood logs and pile them up, and the fire would keep burning all night.

The women used to carry flints on their belts to light fires with. They would also sharpen their knives

on them. They would get a little bit of dry, soft cottonwood and strike their flint along side of it, and the cottonwood would catch fire. Of course they didn't have any matches then.

The Indians used to say that there was an Old Man who used to cut great big cherry limbs, and every time somebody passed away, he would cut a chip from it. When the Spring came, he would know how many people had died. In those days they didn't dig graves or bury people in caskets. They would lay the dead people on top of trees and tie them to the trees. When a whole family died, for example during the smallpox epidemic, they would just leave them in the teepee. They didn't bother to take any of their belongings out of the teepee, they would just close the door tightly and put logs all around it.

My sister told me about another old custom. When she had babies, she didn't have any baby powder or vaseline or diapers. She would tell me to go out and pick up really dry horse manure, and when I brought it back, she would work it in her hands until it would be just like cotton. She didn't have any diapers, so she would use this soft horse manure instead, and then she wouldn't have any diapers to wash. Instead of putting powder aroud the baby's neck and under its arms, she would paint the neck, and under the baby's arms and legs, and the baby would never have any problem with chafing. She didn't have a baby cradle, so we would go out in the field and pick sweet grass. Then she would braid it and make a back rest and lay the baby against it.

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The Magic Leggings

One day as Napi was traveling along, he saw a beautiful lodge. He decided to enter the lodge. He was tired of traveling and was very hungry. The owner of the lodge, who was the Sun, fed Napi and invited him to stay.

The Sun owned a wonderful pair of leggings. The leggings were magical fire leggings. Whenever the Sun was hungry he would put on his leggings. He would circle a bunch of brush and as he circled the brush, fire would appear and scare the deer out. The Sun would then kill one of the frightened deer for food.

Napi wanted the magical leggings for his own use. He also found that they helped the owner travel very fast.

"I'm going to steal those leggings," thought Napi. "Then I can get to where I'm going faster. I will not drag along."

So Napi decided to stay in this lodge one more night. When the Sun was gone, Napi grabbed the magic leggings and ran away.

Soon old Napi was very tired. He stopped to rest. He felt sleepy so he made a pillow with the leggings and fell fast asleep.

When he awoke he was back in the Sun's lodge. "What are you doing with my leggings?" asked the Sun. "I needed a pillow," said Napi, "so I used your leggings."

The Sun knew Napi was up to something. The Sun told Napi the leggings belonged to him. Napi asked if he could use them. The Sun told Napi, "Yes." But Napi had to use them properly and not more than three times in a row.

Napi put the leggings on and began to show off. Soon he got carried away with his tricks. He used them very well three times. The fourth time he used

them, he started a trail of fire. The fire soon caught Napi and set his hair, clothes, and leggings on fire.

Napi jumped into a lake to put out his burning clothes. But it was too late, the magic leggings were burned up. Napi was sorry he lost the magic leggings. He had not used the leggings properly.

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Napi and His Mate

Napi and his mate were walking next to a river. The river was deep. It flowed smoothly. They stopped. Napi picked up a stick and a rock.

He told his woman (he never called her wife), "I have a rock and a stick. I will throw them into the water. You choose one, either the rock or the stick."

Napi then threw the stick in the water. It floated slowly down the river. Next he threw the rock. It sank. "Which do you prefer?" he told his mate, "The rock or the stick?" The woman choose the rock.

Later they finally had a little boy. The little boy got very sick. All the Medicine Men could not save the boy. He soon died.

The woman cried and cried for the little boy. She begged Napi to bring him back.

Napi told her that he must be gone forever.

"You chose the rock that sank," he explained. "So it will be. From now on when people get very sick and cannot be cured, they will die. The loved ones will mourn for them. If you had chosen the stick, people would remain very sick. They would suffer forever."

That is why, today, because of this incident, that generations of people die.

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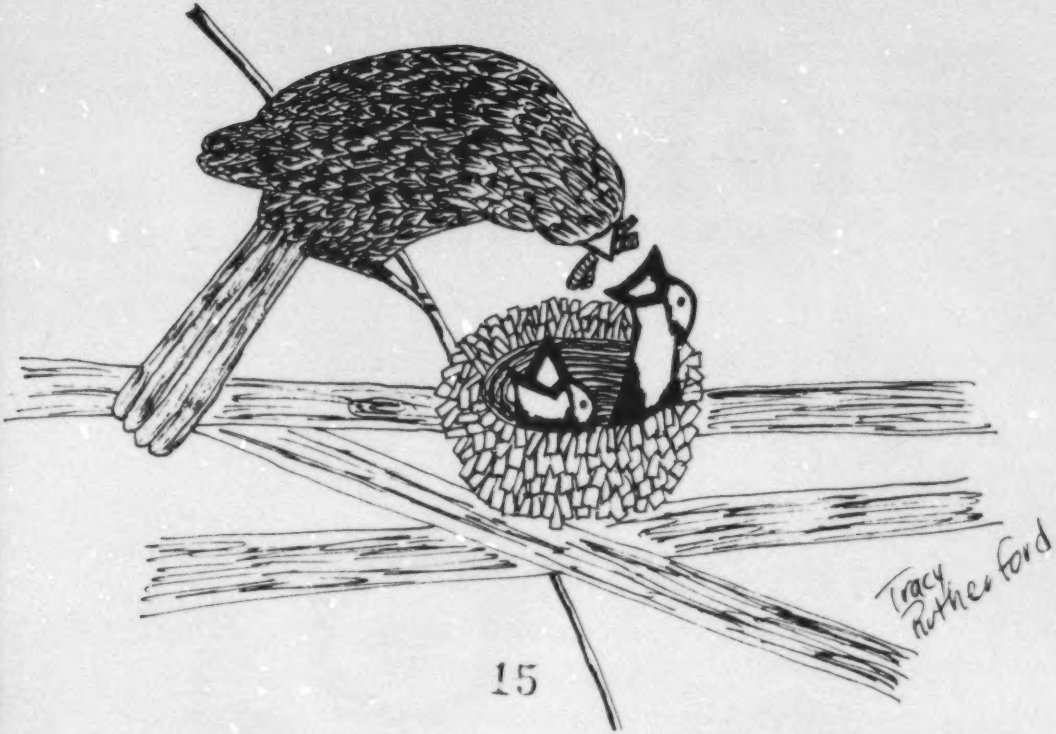
Tracy
Rutherford

Napi and the Baby Birds

One day, as Napi was walking along, he found a little bird's nest. The little ones were waiting for Mother Bird to bring them a worm. When they heard Napi coming they all opened their mouths.

"Oh, how homely," thought Napi. Napi painted their mouths red instead of giving them a worm. He also made their mouths bigger.

When Mother Bird returned she found her babies with big, red mouths. She did not like this.

"Napi did this to us," her little ones told her.

Mother Bird flew off to find Napi. She was going to punish him for making her babies ugly.

When she found Napi she began to peck at him. He ran, but Mother Bird kept pecking him on the head.

"That's for making my little ones ugly," she told Napi.

"All right, from now on all the birds hatched will look like this. They will have big, red, homely mouths," said Napi.

And so it is today. That is why little birds wait for their mothers to feed their big, red mouths.

Napi and the Elk Dance

Old Napi was playing follow the leader with the elk. Napi had a rattle. Each time he danced the elk heard the rattle and followed him. He did this until it became dark.

Finally, he danced near a high cut bank. Napi threw the rattle over the bank. Napi ran under the bank and hollered for all to jump. He told them it was a lot of fun. Hearing the rattle the elk followed and fell over the bank. All but one mother elk jumped.

"Have pity on me Old Man, my child is about to be born," she told Napi.

Napi said, "Go then, so there will be elk in the future."

So Napi skinned all of the elk and cut up the meat to dry. He hung the tongues up on poles so nothing could get at them. He built a fire and cooked and ate his fill of the elk meat.

Along came a lame coyote. The coyote was hungry and asked Napi to share his food. Napi was stingy and said no. The coyote kept begging Napi as he was very hungry. Napi finally agreed, but only if coyote could beat Napi in a foot race. Coyote said he was too crippled, but agreed.

The coyote went and called to the North, South, East and West, then he invited all the animals to watch the race.

The race began with Napi taking the lead. Coyote decided to quit pretending he was lame. Soon he passed Napi and beat him.

Napi then knew the coyote would beat him back to the elk meat. So he called to the coyote, "Save me some meat."

But coyote and the other animals had a great feast. They ate all the elk meat except the tongues they

could not reach. The mice crawled up the poles and ate the meat of the tongues.

When Napi arrived there was nothing left for him.

Napi went hungry because of his selfishness.

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Napi Joins the Mouse Dance

Napi found an elk skull. He heard mice singing and dancing inside of it. He looked inside where the mice were holding each others paws and dancing in a circle.

Napi asked if he could join in the dance. The head mouse said he could, but his body was too large. So Napi simply put his head inside the skull and shook his head up and down in beat with the music. The mice sang all day and night for two days.

Finally Napi asked, "How long do you dance?"

"Four days," replied the mice. "But you must not fall asleep."

Napi got tired and fell asleep. The mice chewed all his hair off. This is how bald people came into being.

When he awoke the mice had gone and he could not get the elk head off. He could not see. Napi walked over a steep bank and fell into a river. He floated downstream.

The Indian people from a nearby camp noticed him and got excited.

They shouted, "Here comes an elk!" Napi pretended to holler like an elk. An old woman finally broke open the skull. She was disappointed to find Napi instead of an elk.

He fooled the people by pretending to be an elk, so he could be rid of the heavy skull.

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Napi Looses His Eyes

One day as Napi was walking through the woods he saw some birds fluttering about in the trees and he heard the sound chickadeedeedeedeedee.

Napi's curiosity was excited. "Hello brothers and sisters. What are you doing?"

"Oh, it's you, Napi," answered a bird. "We are playing a game."

The birds would chickadeedeedeedeedee and their eyes would go out of their heads and attach to a tree. The little birds would then chickadeedeedeedeedee, and their eyes would return to their places.

"Well, if you want to join us, climb up the tree," said the bird. "There is a trick to our game. If I show you, you must not let your eyes go out of your head more then three times a day. You will be sorry if you do so."

"All right," said Napi.

The birds then taught Napi the game. Napi was happy and began playing right away. Napi could not resist playing the game three times in a row. He was having such a good time he decided not to listen to the warning of the little bird. So Napi chickadeedeedeedeed and his eyes went out of his head the fourth time. He chickadeedeedeedeedeed, but they did not return, they stuck fast in the tree.

Napi has been chickadeeing ever since and has not been able to get his eyes back.

If at some time you go into the mountains, look at a quaking aspen tree. If you look closely you will easily find Napi's eyes.

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Napi Punishes A Rock

Napi and his friend fox were traveling one warm day. They stopped to rest on a large rock. Napi was very warm with his buffalo robe on. He pitied the rock for he had no robe to cover with. Napi gave the rock his robe so he would be protected from the weather.

The fox and Napi continued on. Soon a rain began to fall on them. Napi was getting cold and missed his robe.

He told the fox, "Go back to the rock and get my robe."

The little fox ran back to the rock. But the rock refused to give Napi his robe back. Napi got sassy and went back to the rock.

"Give me my robe! You do not need a robe."

Napi grabbed his robe. Then he and the fox went on. Soon the ground behind them began to rumble. The rock was chasing them. They began to run. Fox climbed in a hole and closed it from the inside. Napi ran faster, but the rock gained on him.

"Oh my brother hawks," yelled Napi, "help me!"

The hawks heard Napi and came to his rescue. They swooped down on the rock and made loud noises with their wings. Each time they hit the rock a piece of it would break off. Finally the rock broke into many pieces and was scattered all over.

Today this is why we see the remains of the rock scattered over the land.

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BY KENNY DOOLE
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Napi Teases The Bear

A large and grumpy bear was digging. The bear was turning up rocks looking for insects. Napi liked to tease. He knew the bear had a very short tail, so he began teasing the bear.

"No tail," hollered Napi to the bear. The bear looked up at Napi, then continued digging.

Napi hollered again, "No tail." Again lazy old bear just looked at Napi.

Napi continued to tease the bear calling him "no tail." The bear ignored him for some time. All of a sudden the bear took after Napi.

The bear chased Napi around and around a big rock. The bear was getting closer and closer to Napi. Finally he decided to use his bow and arrow on the bear. Each time Napi shot at the bear the arrows broke because they were rotten. Napi went to use his knife, but that was also broken.

As Napi continued to run he stumbled over a buffalo horn. Napi grabbed the horn. He gathered his courage and placed the horn on his head. He charged at the bear as if to hook him. Napi hollered and made scary noises. This frightened the bear and the bear disappeared into the woods.

Old Napi felt very good. He had won the fight.

Napi, The Ground Squirrels and the Bobcat

Napi came upon a place where many ground squirrels were playing a game. He saw one of the squirrels crawl into the hot ashes of a fire. There he stayed until he whistled. The other squirrels pulled him out.

Napi asked if he could play in the game. "Come, Napi," said the squirrels, "and play with us."

"Only if you bury me first," said Napi.

So the squirrels buried Napi in the hot ashes. No sooner had the squirrels covered him with the hot ashes when he started whistling. They quickly pulled him out.

"Now it is your turn," he told the squirrels.

All the squirrels got in the ashes except one mother. She was afraid.

"Go then," Napi told the mother squirrel, "so there will be other squirrels."

Soon the squirrels began to whistle, but he left them in the ashes until they roasted. He then ate as many of the roasted squirrels as he could. Being so full of food he fell asleep. Along came a bobcat and ate the rest of the cooked squirrels.

When Napi finally woke up, he became very angry. Something had eaten up his food! He followed its' tracks. Soon he found the animal who ate his food. It was the bobcat. Napi took the bobcat by the ears and hit his face against a stone. He broke his tail off and made it bobbed at the end. He then stretched his legs and body. He made the bobcat long and slender. When Napi finished with the bobcat he told him, "You bobcats will always look this way."

Napi caused the bobcats to have the features we now see today.

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The Story of Marriage

In the old times, men and women lived separately. Old Napi was responsible for bringing them together. The women were skilled in running buffalo over a cliff to get food. They were also skilled in tanning and sewing, so they knew how to make good clothes and fine teepees.

The men killed their game with bows and arrows. They did not know how to tan or sew very well. All their clothes were made of animal skins and fixed crudely. Their lodges were made of green hides.

So Napi went to the Women's Camp and told them of the way the men lived. The Chief Woman took pity on the men. She asked Napi to bring them to their camp so the women could choose mates. Old Napi brought the men to a hill near the Women's Camp. The women had been busy preparing buffalo. The Chief Woman came forward first to choose a mate. She was dressed poorly and looked shabby from cutting buffalo meat. She chose Napi, but he refused her because she did not look appealing to him. This made the Chief Woman very angry.

She returned to her Camp and told the other women not to pick Napi as a mate. She then dressed in her finest clothes and went back to the men. This time Old Napi liked her and tried everything to get her to choose him, but she picked another mate.

All the men had been chosen, except Napi. Then the Chief Woman turned Napi into a pine tree. There he remains as a lone pine tree.

If you ever happen to see a lone pine tree on a side hill, it will remind you of old Napi and how he never got married.

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Writer-Compiler

Darnell Davis Rides At The Door

Darnell is the wife of Robert "Smokey" Rides At The Door. Together they have three children and reside south of Browning on the Backfeet Reservation.

Darnell began writing as a youngster. Her interest in her culture and heritage have given her infinate subjects to write of.

Presently Darnell is hostess for a public service television program over a local T.V. station. Her program is produced by and for Montana Native Americans. Currently she is engaged in writing stories for children and teens.

About the Illustrator

Barbara Gilham Aubert, a Blackfeet born in 1951 has studied Art and Cultural Studies at Bacone College Oklahoma (Indian Circle), Eastern Montana College, University of Montana and the College of Great Falls. She has been employed in Pre-K, Post secondary from 1975 to 1979. Barbara now lives in Browning with her husband Ed, and their two children.

More on Illustrators

Tracy Rutherford and Kenny Doore, each contributed a line drawing for our Napi Stories book. Tracy and Kenny are students in Browning with a talented interest in art.